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AN EXPERIENCE WITH THE ÆNEID

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Is the *Aeneid* taught well by the average teacher in the secondary school? That question recurred to me when I read¹ an account of Cicero's popularity in Maine, and of the lack of appreciation shown by Maine boys and girls for Vergil. The writer of the article gives very frankly their point of view, and it is perhaps representative of a common, youthful indifference to the epic.

The virtues of the pious Aeneas were of a variety not mentioned in our Sunday-school lessons; we held his seamanship very cheap. "How did they ever git to Troy?" our class orator inquired dubiously "There wa'n't one in the whole lot't knew any more 'bout navigation 'n a fly in a pan o' milk."

From the first we had no use for Dido. Love was an emotion which had been mentioned in our hearing, and there were boys and girls among our number who "went together" and displayed varying degrees of what we called "softness" in so doing. But that any human creature could be soft enough deliberately to toast herself upon a funeral pile, simply because another human creature sailed away and left her, was beyond our wildest conception of the tender passion. The uncouth lad who frequently wrote notes for general circulation among the girls of the class issued the following as soon as Dido's funeral intentions were announced:

"*Pass this on.* Dido was a Fool; how'd she know but Eneeus would be Blowed back by the first Wind?"

This callousness to the feeling of the poem and the drama of the story can be only partially explained by the author's implied reason that the class was plunged into Vergil too soon. That pedagogical mistake could hardly destroy all appreciation of the poem, had the teacher himself been as stirred by Vergil as by Cicero. At least that suspicion arises, strengthened by observation of the way in which the *Aeneid* is often taught—as an exercise in reading Latin without regard to its content, its literary connections as an epic, or its historical significance.

¹ *Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1904.

Can this traditional reading of the *Aeneid* in the schools be made more interesting, more vital? Professor Bennett in his book¹ on teaching Latin gives a few general suggestions which indicate the sort of work that should be done in connection with the first six books: intensive work on the subject-matter; comparative work between Vergil and Homer; historical work on the relation of the poem to the Augustan age. In my own teaching I have evolved more detailed plans in accordance with these general principles which may suggest to the inexperienced teacher what collateral work can be done in a secondary school. The course was given in this way for several years to girls who were studying the *Aeneid* in the fourth year of a high-school course (after Caesar and Cicero), four periods of forty minutes each week being given throughout the year to translation, the fifth to Latin composition. The same work would surely appeal to the boys, and far from adding to the difficulties of the course, the collateral work gives an interest in the poem that makes the translation more a pleasure than a burden. Indeed, all variation from the old way of simply translating the Latin is but to intensify interest in the Latin, the poem itself in its full meaning and various relations standing as the goal of endeavor.

So in the beginning of the course in Vergil as in any new author, the new vocabulary, the poetic constructions, and the meter must be mastered first, and until the first book has been read little else can be done. But the reading of the hexameter cannot be begun too early, if a feeling for the Latin itself is to be developed, or the music ever made sweet upon the tongue. After three or four lessons in translation, the instructor may begin to read the Latin to the class, teaching "the ocean-roll of rhythm," first by imitation, then by analysis, always insisting on the quantitative basis for the line as something very different from the tripping accents of Longfellow's *Evangeline*, best measured perhaps by the slow march of men, shoulder to shoulder in even time. He will not find necessary the memorizing of the rules for quantity which he himself once learned so laboriously, but stating a few general principles—of syllables long or short by position, of regular case endings and terminations—he

¹*The Teaching of Latin and Greek*, by Professors Bennett and Bristol, of Cornell University (Longmans, Green & Co.).

will trust that the Latin, read with accurate quantities as it should be taught from the beginning, will make poetry, just as *Evangeline* is poetry, when read without being scanned. Five minutes a day at the beginning of each recitation devoted to reading the Latin aloud, frequent marking of lines on the board, the occasional reading of the whole review in Latin, the memorizing of short passages—all these means will be effective in teaching a class how to read the *Aeneid*.

At the end of the first book—at the end of each, in fact—my plan was to give a day to general work. A list of questions was given to the class on the content of the book just finished, or on references for reading; then the recitation hour was spent in a general discussion of this work. Specimen lists of questions may be suggestive.

ON BOOK I

- I. What is an epic poem?
- II. What is the difference between the natural epic and the literary epic? Give examples of each class.
- III. What epics did Vergil imitate? Who have imitated Vergil?
- IV. What are the conventional points in the introduction to an epic poem? Illustrate from the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Jerusalem Delivered*.
- V. What are the characteristics of an epic simile? Give illustrations from Book I of the *Aeneid*.
- VI. What is the central theme of the *Aeneid*? Mention two passages in this book in which the theme is developed.
- VII. Outline the narrative of the book.

ON BOOK II

- I. Give an account of the life of Vergil.
- II. Outline the history of the Augustan Age.
- III. In connection with lines 469-514, describe the plan of the normal Roman house.
- IV. Compare the feeling toward Helen shown by Aeneas in II, 567-87 with that of Priam and the old men, *Iliad*, III, 146-65. Read the picture of Helen in Tennyson's "Dream of Fair Women."

ON BOOK III

- I. Read the description of Scylla and Charybdis in *Odyssey*, XII, 73-110 and 235-59. (Use translations by Butcher and Lang, Palmer, or Bryant.) How far does Vergil in III, 410-32 and 554-69, imitate Homer in these descriptions?
- II. Read Milton's *Paradise Lost*, II, 650-61. How far does Milton imitate Vergil's description of Scylla?

III. Read Dante's *Inferno*, Canto XIII, for the imitation of the episode of Polydorus, *Æneid*, III, 19-68. Which description, Dante's or Vergil's, is more romantic? See Pater, *Appreciations with an Essay on Style*, Postscript, pp. 262, 263.

ON BOOK IV

- I. What characteristics of Dido appear in this book? Of Aeneas?
 - II. What charges does Dido bring against Aeneas?
 - III. Are Dido's accusations of Aeneas justified?
 - IV. What part do the gods play in this book? Are they necessary to the development of the plot?
 - V. What is the fundamental difference in the relation between Aeneas and Dido, and that of Antony and Cleopatra?
- Why does modern feeling blame Aeneas for leaving Dido and Antony for staying with Cleopatra?

This fourth book always seemed to me the most difficult to teach well, although it is the most modern and romantic part of the *Æneid*. But as college freshmen laugh at Catulus, so high-school seniors like those in Maine either have no conception of passion, or find what seems an abnormal relation, an outrage to their sense of the fitting. I have always found, however, that the story of Dido and Aeneas was really intensely interesting to young people in that period of adolescence when the relation between men and women begins, consciously or unconsciously, to occupy their thoughts, and it seemed to me desirable that the subject-matter of Book IV should be discussed freely in order that its effect on the minds of the students might be understood and met. In three different years my class in Vergil held a debate on the question: "Resolved, That Dido's accusation of Aeneas was justified." The girls formulated the charges from Dido's own speeches:

- I. Of treachery in trying to depart secretly (IV, 305, 306).
- II. Of lack of fidelity to their relation (307, 316, 324, 431).
- III. Of ingratitude (317-19, 373-75).
- IV. Of lack of chivalry in leaving her defenseless in the midst of her enemies (320, 321, 325, 326).

This debate always aroused the warmest discussion, although at first invariably there was no one in the class who would volunteer to support Aeneas. But when one-half of the class had been compelled to take the unfortunate hero's side, a careful study of his own words, and a deeper thought in regard to his duty to his race and

the standards of the times, did much to win sympathy for the reluctant founder of an empire.

ON BOOK V

I. Read a translation of *Iliad*, XXIII (Lang, Leaf, and Myer, or Bryant). Make a list of the contests in *Iliad*, XXIII, and of those in *Aeneid*, V. Compare the two, and see what material Vergil took from Homer and what he added.

Notice the details of the descriptions in both accounts, and see how far Vergil imitated Homer.

II. Read the account of the death of Nisus and Euryalus, *Aeneid*, IX, 184-449. (Conington's translation into verse. [Longmans, Green & Co.], pp. 293-304. Mackail's, pp. 198-206.)

ON BOOK VI

I. Read a translation of *Odyssey*, XI.

II. Compare the Homeric Hades with the Vergilian in regard to:

a) The general character of the region.

b) The character of the inhabitants. (The instructor might, in connection with this work, outline to the class the elaborate plan of Dante's *Inferno* to show the continued increase of definiteness and vividness in the picture of the lower world.)

III. Read in Conington's Vergil the introduction to Book VI (Vol. II, pp. 423-26).

IV. State clearly the ideas of *Aeneid*, VI, 724-51. (Explain to the class simply pantheism, Platonism, Pythagoreanism.)

When the sixth book is finished, the narrative of the rest of the *Aeneid* should be told the class, that the pupils may have at least the outlines of the whole epic in mind. In this narrative, Aeneas seems more of a hero even to the modern youth, for as war is the subject of these six books and the *Iliad* their model, while the *Odyssey* is the model of the first six, so Aeneas in the last six is no longer Odysseus, the wanderer, but Achilles, the warrior. His passivity and repression in Carthage disappear on the field when Pallas, his youthful ally, is slain and natural grief arms him against Turnus, the slayer. The story of these six books has charm as well as power in romantic episodes like the death of Nisus and Euryalus, and the transformation of the Trojan galleys into sea-nymphs; again, in the women whom Vergil depicts with such understanding—the shadowy Lavinia, whose hand is the cause of the Latin war; Camilla, the Roman Joan of Arc, defending her native town; and Juturna, half goddess, wholly sister, who as her brother's charioteer tries to avert

his doom. All this narrative can be made vivid by the reading of passages in translation, and if this is done before a review of the first six books, a new interest and a new understanding are given to them.

No means to that end, however, seem as effective as special topic work. Of course, the subjects must be such as will appeal to the high-school pupil and the method of treatment very simple, but the value of the work is that it concentrates attention on the subject-matter of the poem and gives to each one a personal interest. The topics in the list given have been found practical by actual test.

- I. The character of Dido.
- II. The character of Aeneas.
- III. Andromache and Creusa.
- IV. The Old Men of the *Aeneid*: Priam and Anchises.
- V. The Conception of Jupiter in the *Aeneid*.
- VI. Religious Ceremonies in the *Aeneid*.
- VII. The Prayers in the *Aeneid*.
- VIII. Omens and Oracles.
- IX. Visions and Dreams.
- X. The Idea of Fate.
- XI. The Central Theme of the *Aeneid*.
- XII. Vergil's Picture of the Future World.
- XIII. Vergil's Similes.
- XIV. Historical Allusions.
- XV. The Elements of the Horrible.
- XVI. Pictures of the Sea.
- XVII. Night Scenes.
- XVIII. Vergil's Debt to Homer.
- XIX. Memorable Lines and Phrases.

When the best of these topics were read to the class, the girls showed more interest in each other's work than they ever felt in Sellar's or Nettleship's interpretations, even crude comments by some one of their own age vivifying the content of the poem.

Another means to the same end is the use of pictures. In the ideal Vergil classroom there will be a few significant photographs on the wall: "Turner's "Dido Building the Walls of Carthage," Domenichino's "Aeneas and his Father," Jalabert's "Vergil, Horace, and Varius in the Gardens of Maecenas," and casts of the young Augustus and the emperor in armor, along with maps of Greece, Italy, and Rome. Rich illustrative material suggests itself to any

collector, and for the busy the Soule Company has made a collection of photographs illustrating the first six books of the *Aeneid*. Cheaper pictures from the Perry and the Brown Companies, and the possible blue-prints, may be collected by the pupils themselves—a work that proves fascinating to those who have not lost a childish fondness for scrap-book and paste-pot. One girl asked to be allowed to illustrate Vergil for her special topic work, and the hundred or more pictures she collected with the Latin lines illustrated written under them gave the whole class pleasure.

As delightful as such a connection between the epic and art is the connection between the epic and modern literature. To many young people Vergil is the guide to the *Inferno*, as he was to Dante, the first interest in the Italian being aroused by his mention of the master from whom he took his beautiful style. I remember my own pleasure when I first came upon Tennyson's poem written for the Mantuans, and read that wonderful appreciation in verse of the Latin poems I had loved. Even now in the current magazines, a watchful eye is rewarded by an occasional poem, like that by S. Cole in the *Atlantic* of January, 1903, "In Via Merulana," which paints as vividly as Jalabert's picture the gardens of Maecenas, with the great patron, "the hero of the Sabine farm," and Vergil himself, "who wrote for Rome her noblest song." Every modern appreciation of this sort, every tracing of Vergil's influence on the moderns like that by W. P. Mustard in *Classical Echoes in Tennyson*, intensifies the interest of a class in its author as a force though dead yet living.

I have said little about the instructor's tools, but the working library which he has at hand is really the foundation on which he builds. It is so true that the books which we have in our rooms are the books we really know. Few young instructors have a great library to use, and for such a small school library or a shelf beside one's desk is an indispensable aid. For this I add a brief bibliography.

By such simple means as those suggested, the study of the *Aeneid* can be made, I believe, far more alive and fruitful than it usually is. The aim of the instructor in carrying out these plans, in making others of his own, should be to teach the *Aeneid* as a great epic, in

its historical relation to Homer on the one hand, to Dante on the other; to show its historical significance as the voice of a visionist proclaiming in the new régime of Augustus' reign Rome's great past and her great future; and to find through the poem the hidden personality of the writer: in the large structure of the epic as well as in its parts, his idealization of Rome; in significant line and phrase, his understanding of life and its problems; in his characters, his knowledge of men and his sympathy; in his style—diction, phrase, figure, and rhythm—the fine workmanship of the great artist.

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